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Tampa Bay Times

FLORIDA'S BEST NEWS PAPER

tampabay.com

Friday, June 12, 2020 1:30

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC For the latest news, go to tampabay.com/coronavirus

Bell will ring in August

Gov. DeSantis announces the "full capacity" reopening of Florida's schools.

BY JEFFREY S. MACKENZIE
Times Staff Writer

Arguing that Florida's economy depends upon it, Gov. Ron DeSantis on Thursday unveiled a plan that expects K-12 schools to reopen in August at "full capacity."

What that looks like will rely on decisions made by local leaders who know their communities best, he said during a news conference in Melbourne. To help them, the state offered a lengthy list of suggestions based on discussions with experts and other advisers.

The effort must make safety a priority, DeSantis said. Facilities and employees have to feel confident that returning to campus will not create health risks. The plan includes many ideas about disinfecting, cleaning and social distancing — as well as possibilities for when distancing is not possible, such as on buses.

At the same time, schools must operate with a clear sense of purpose as they get back to business, DeSantis and education commissioner Richard Corcoran said. Closing achievement gaps among groups of students, many of whom likely suffered learning losses during a spring of distance

schooling, should drive that moral imperative, they said.

"We have a great opportunity to get back on good footing," DeSantis said. "I know our kids have been in difficult circumstances. ... Getting back to the school year is going to be really, really important to the well-being of our kids."

Accomplishing the task will be costly. DeSantis discussed how the state plans to use nearly \$1 billion in federal CARES Act funds for education. Schools have 12 options for spending the money they receive, including using it for cleaning sup-

plies and providing mental health services and supports.

The governor also had a plan for some of the flexible money in the program, with a goal of targeting the achievement gap and learning losses. That includes initiatives to bolster literacy instruction in prekindergarten through third grade, as well as programs to boost workforce training.

"Going after the achievement gap in the way he is, it is a game-changer," Corcoran said.

Also attending the announcement were school superintendents from

See **SCHOOLS, 13A**



A scene from Memorial Day weekend at Clearwater Beach. The virus is now affecting more than just the elderly and at-risk people.

NEW CASE SURGE, NEW WAVE WORRIES

On a record day, the alarming news is that coronavirus cases are on the rise in young people.

BY NIKKI ELLERBROGH, CHARLES FRAGO AND C.T. BOWEN
Times Staff Writers

Records were set Thursday — none of them good.

The U.S. logged more than 2 million cases of the coronavirus. Florida saw the highest single-day number of new COVID-19 patients since the state first started reporting cases on March 3.

And in the Tampa Bay region, Hillsborough and Pinellas counties saw the highest single-day number of coronavirus cases local officials have ever reported as the pandemic stretched into its fourth month.

This week's alarming spike reversed fears of a second wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic. New data also shows that the virus is affecting more than just the immunocompromised.

See **CORONAVIRUS, 10A**



Empty seats space out riders on the Sheikra roller coaster Thursday at Busch Gardens. The park had been closed since March 16.

88 DAYS LATER ... WHEEEEE!



A sign alerts patrons to where they can take a break from face masks in several "Face Covering Relaxation Zones."

Busch Gardens reopens Thursday with light crowds, health measures and heat.

BY SHARON RENNEBERG BYRNE
Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — For the first time in three months, fans lined up to enter the terrors Thursday at Busch Gardens. But this time, they had to wear face masks and have their temperatures checked.

The crowds were light on reopening day, with no wait time at noon for the super popular roller coaster Sheikra and only a 15-minute wait for Tigris, the new ride touted as North America's tallest launch coaster.

There was a fairly long line to

get in as the park opened, full of people who had to make a reservation in advance to be there. A Busch Gardens spokeswoman said the capacity is being capped at 50 percent for the time being, and many days have yet to reach that cap.

The park's parent company, SeaWorld Entertainment, also opened its parks in Orlando and Tampa's Adventure Island water park. Guests will find numerous new hand-washing stations and hand sanitizer dispensers around the

See **BUSCH, 11A**



A group of demonstrators protest Wednesday in Orlando over Florida's bulky unemployment benefits system.

Florida adds 110K more jobs claims

Nationally last week, the number rose another 1.54M, totaling 44M since March.

BY RICHARD DANIELSON
Times Staff Writer

The U.S. unemployment rate unexpectedly dropped in May, but claims for unemployment assistance have continued to roll in during June.

Another 1.34 million displaced workers nationwide applied for unemployment benefits last week, the U.S. Department of Labor said Thursday. Since the start of the pandemic, more than 44 million workers have sought relief after being laid off, furloughed or seeing their gig work evaporate.

In Florida, another 110,320 filed claims for unemployment assistance last week, down from nearly 208,000 the week before. Through

See **JOBES, 15A**

GOP CONVENTION IN JACKSONVILLE

President Trump's re-election speech and other key events will move to Florida as large-scale events can be held. Masks will be optional. **17A**

TROLLS JOIN IN

A St. Petersburg City Council virtual meeting is threatened as racist slurs are unleashed. **3A**

Typical June pattern

5 a.m. Now 4 p.m. 83°
77° 85° 90° 83°
20% chance of rain
More, 21A

Suit against Scientology dropped

A Clearwater woman, represented by a victims' rights attorney, alleged childhood sexual abuse.

BY TRACEY McMANIS
Times Staff Writer

A woman has dropped the lawsuit she filed last year against the Church of Scientology that alleged she was repeatedly sexually abused as a child in Scientology's care, including as a kindergarten student at the church's Clearwater Academy.

The woman, named as Jane Doe in court records, filed her complaint in Miami-Dade circuit court in September, becoming the third lawsuit lodged against Scientology and its leader David Miscavige in 2019.

On May 15, a Miami-Dade judge granted Scientology's request to dismiss the case in Pinellas County. The dismissal came on June 5, according to court records.

A legal team led by Philadelphia-based victims' rights attorney Brian Kent represented the plaintiffs in all three 2019 lawsuits against the church.

Kent last year described the litigation as an effort to expose Scientology's structure and policies that allegedly enable abuse, human trafficking and harassment of critics. But the dis-

missal of Doe's case is the second blow to Kent's legal offensive. In January, a Los Angeles judge granted the church's request to move former Scientologist Valerie Hanson's human trafficking and stalking lawsuit into the church's internal arbitration.

Kent did not respond to a phone call or email requesting comment. The Tampa Bay Times is aware of Doe's identity but is not naming her because she is an alleged victim of sexual abuse. Doe told the Times on Wednesday she decided to drop the lawsuit because of uncooperativeness from her legal team and after getting an update from the Clearwater Police Department about its investigation, two law consultants.

See **SCIENTOLOGY, 15A**

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